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## **Do nonlinguists practice linguistics?**

### **An anti-eliminative approach to folk theories**

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‘Oh, stop calling me Madam, it’s so annoying! Henever says the things I want to hear, he only says things that get on my nerves’ (a second-hand goods dealer, Paris, September 2008, 20<sup>th</sup> arrondissement; translated from the French)

Popular prejudice will eventually prevail over scientific incredulity, and the observations of old wives will get the better of learned theories. When it comes to naive observations, science, by nature excessively overweening, is always one step behind public common sense (Raspail, *Histoire de la santé et de la maladie*; translated from the French).

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Folk linguistics appears to have been fairly comprehensively described and defined, not least in this special issue, but also in international and (later) French research conducted over the course of the last fifteen years<sup>2</sup>. A range of linguistic practices known as *folk linguistics* (or by various other adjectives, including *profane*, *spontaneous*, *wild*, *naïve*, *lay*, etc.) are now well-established, and a rich field of research has developed as a result, drawing linguists with an interest in the imaginary and representational productions of speakers (whoever they may be).

Following Brekle 1989, a tripartite typology of folk practices in linguistics was presented in Paveau 2000 (1. Descriptions, 2. Prescriptions, 3. Interventions). We are now beginning to understand the wide range of settings in which these practices can be found, as well as the variety of folk activities involving the use or study of language (the press, schools, internet forums, conversation guides, everyday conversations etc.), as illustrated by the papers published in this issue. We are also beginning to understand just what it is that nonlinguists (Preston) actually *do*, and precisely *where* and *when* they do it. Yet we appear to know far less about *who* nonlinguists exactly *are* and about the *value* of folk linguistic theory. It is the central purpose of this paper to examine these two issues. For heuristic purposes, the paper begins with a typology of nonlinguists based on categories that are not discrete. To be a nonlinguist is not a permanent state but an activity that can be practiced at a particular point in time and in a particular place even by linguists themselves. There is in this sense a nonlinguist *position* that can always be traded for another position. Examples of activities that belong only debatably to folk linguistics will be examined. These examples will be used to challenge the relations posited between the ‘identities’ of nonlinguists and the nature of their activities. Secondly, following on from Paveau 2007 and 2008a, the paper will examine the complex epistemological and philosophical issue of the validity of folk linguistics, a question clearly linked to (and subsumed by) the validity of the folk sciences

more generally. In particular, the paper will examine the concepts of knowledge and epilinguistic awareness, which provide arguments in favor of an integrational position<sup>3</sup>, i.e. an anti-eliminative position: folk propositions are not necessarily false beliefs that must be eliminated from the sphere of science, but constitute perceptive, subjective and incomplete forms of knowledge that need to be incorporated into the scientific data of linguistics.

## 1. The identity of nonlinguists

The question of the identity or identification of nonlinguists is perhaps one of the thorniest issues in folk linguistics. The professional identification of linguists is made relatively easy by clear indicators such as university courses, qualifications, academic specialisms pursued (in the case of France) within specific sections of the CNU (*Conseil National des Universités* or National University Council) and of the CNRS (in particular sections 7, 9 and 34 of the CNRS, the French National Center for Scientific Research) and a disciplinary literature that has been relatively well covered and marked out in reference works and dictionaries. We have yet to establish equally reliable criteria for the definition of the professional identity of nonlinguists involved in linguistic activities. For instance, is a writer a folk linguist? Should proofreaders in the written media and publishing houses be viewed as folk linguists? And what about lawyers, who are required as part of their work to analyze words as carefully and as scrupulously as a professional lexicologist? In the absolute, there is perhaps good reason to answer in the affirmative. However, a comparison with ordinary speakers, e.g. the ‘man on the street’ celebrating the beauty of vocabulary or bemoaning the deterioration of language (a common figure in France, a country where language is a constant object of passionate debate<sup>4</sup>), is perhaps enough to challenge this view. After all, the first three figures seem more entitled to the label ‘linguist’ than the fourth figure (i.e. the ‘man on the street’), a somewhat naïve and (in truth) uncultivated amateur linguist. In short, how might we identify or describe the category of speakers involved in producing metalinguistic and metadiscursive statements based on subjective non-disciplinary and non-academic positions?

### 1.1. Discursive positions

As in many areas of knowledge within the human sciences, binary Cartesian thought (linguists vs. nonlinguists conceived as discrete categories) leads to the dead-end of idealism. We may therefore be better advised to view the issue as a matter of degree. At the risk of suggesting a position that will seem iconoclastic to those with a firm belief in the purity and objectivity of science, it seems preferable to posit a continuum between those who practice linguistics proper and those who practice something that cannot properly be described as linguistics. In this sense, we may posit two opposing poles representing theoretical extremes: the ‘erudite’, ‘scientific’ or ‘academic’ linguist involved in handling ‘exact’ knowledge, as opposed to the spontaneous linguist producing analyses of the kind illustrated by the second-hand dealer quoted in the epigraph (‘he never says the things I want to hear’).

In a recent study, Günter Schmale conducted an initial analysis of the issue. Analyzing folk linguistics as a crossroads between academic linguistics, amateur linguistics and teaching/vulgarization (incidentally a view entirely subscribed to in this paper), Schmale

provided a brief typology of spontaneous linguists focusing on conversation analysis: Schmale's spectrum, ranging from 'a lack of knowledge about conversation' to 'a perfect knowledge of conversational organization', includes ordinary speakers, writers, 'amateur' linguists, non-conversationalist' linguists, and 'conversationalists' (Schmale 2008, see in particular the figure included in Schmale's paper). This paper aims to provide a more global analysis that applies not only to conversation but to language and French verbal productions more generally. The typology presented in this paper is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- to describe the nature of 'non-linguistic' activity as accurately as possible by positing discursive positions that are by definition transitory and not inherently linked to social, professional or cultural identities, rather than socially fixed identities (e.g. the writer, the journalist, the typographer). Examples of non-linguistic activity include the following situations: the owner of a bar begins a conversation about text-messaging with customers; a foreign secretary produces a text about the deterioration of French; a professional linguist produces a non-linguistic discourse about language, for instance an aesthetic discourse (e.g. not liking a word because it 'sounds' wrong and 'grates' on the ears), by virtue of the well-known discordance between behavior and introspection on which Labovian sociolinguistics was partly based and which may be viewed as a defining feature of the concept of linguistic security vs. linguistic insecurity (Labov 2001 [1975]);
- to raise the question of the incorporation of productions pertaining not only to metalinguistics but also to epilinguistics, i.e. an unconscious and therefore implicit form of language competence. This includes all types of wordplay, tongue twisters, puns and deliberate malapropisms, pronunciation games (*les chaussettes de l'archiduchesse, la reine Didon qui dîna dit-on*, etc.), plays on signifiers such as 'Mr. and Mrs. so and so have a son...' <sup>5</sup>, jokes with a linguistic substrate or dimension, impressions or imitations of accents and ways of speaking, etc. Speakers who adopt a simultaneously expert and playful or ludic position toward language will be referred to as *ludo-linguists*. The issue is to determine whether these productions (which involve a highly sophisticated form of epilinguistic competence) pertain to linguistic activity. Since they perform an explicit didactic role, it seems reasonable to posit that they do in fact pertain to linguistic activity. However, their position at the limit between linguistic and language activities (i.e. between activities *about* language and activities *involving the use of* language) somewhat complicates the issue.

## 1.2. An attempt at a typology

The following typology is based on recent research on folk linguistics and normative positions, on observations made in previous research conducted by the author, and in particular on a corpus used as part of research presented in *La Langue Française – Passions et Polémiques*. A 'coefficient' of possession of linguistic knowledge is used to categorize the various positions, and is supplemented by a rough categorization of types of practices based on the trilogy presented above:

- Professional linguists, who provide linguistic descriptions;
- Nonlinguist academics ('linguist-historians' such as Mension-Rigau in *Aristocrates et Grands Bourgeois* or 'linguist-sociologists' such as Bourdieu in *La Distinction*), also involved in articulating linguistic descriptions;
- Amateur linguists (or laylinguists, e.g. academicians such as M. Druon, lawyers such as G. Cornu, the author of a book on legal linguistics, see Cornu 2005 [1990] and *infra* 1.3.1.), providing descriptions and prescriptions;
- Logophiles, glossomaniacs<sup>6</sup>, and other 'language fanatics' (e.g. J.-P. Brisset and G. Orwell), involved in language interventions through invention or deformation;
- Correctors/proof-readers/editors (e.g. the legendary proof-reader of *Le Monde* J.-P. Collignon and his successors, involved in producing a discourse about their 'linguistic' activity on the blog 'Langue sauce piquante'<sup>7</sup>); experts on television shows (e.g. 'Maître' Capelovici and his successors on *Des chiffres et des lettres*) offering descriptions and prescriptions (including corrections);
- Writers and essayists (Proust, J. Paulhan, P. Daninos, P. Jullian, R. Beauvais...) involved in both descriptive and prescriptive activities;
- Ludo-linguists (comedians, impressionists, impersonators, humorists, punsters; e.g. Thierry Le Luron imitating Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Sylvie Joly and her 'Bourgeoise' character, Florence Foresti and her character Anne-Sophie de la Coquille, Coluche and his 'beauf' character, i.e. a 'boor' or 'redneck'), providing linguistic descriptions/interpretations;
- Particular categories of speakers (e.g. activists and language lovers) and lawyers in their textual and oral activities, centering on description and intervention;
- Ordinary speakers (e.g. the second-hand dealer on rue de la Chine, the anonymous authors of readers' mail and messages on internet blogs and forums, the 'dominants' described by J.-C. Passeron; see *infra*), who probably combine all three types of practices.

Far from being discrete or isolated, the various positions need to be viewed as permeable and even interchangeable. After all, a speaker or writer may easily shift from one position to another, as illustrated by the case of J.R.R. Tolkien, the philologist and lexicographer and professor of medieval English, who may reasonably be viewed as a logophile by virtue of having invented fictional languages, including the much celebrated Elvish language. A similar kind of boundary-crossing was also exemplified by Saussure, the first professional linguist in the history of the theory of the sign and a glossomaniac exhibiting distinct ludo-linguistic tendencies in his *Anagrammes*.

The permeability of the various positions also implies a permeability of knowledge fields and areas. In other words, linguistic knowledge informs the knowledge of folk linguists and vice versa. This paper argues that categories are not discrete since it is important to recognize that scientific or academic knowledge is not unrelated to or disconnected from the epilinguistic awareness of speakers.

### 1.3. Some examples: lawyers, writers, logophiles, ludo-linguists and activists

### 1.3.1. *Legal linguistics*

The textbook on legal linguistics by G.Cornu (2005 [1990]) provides an interesting example of folk linguistics in action. Cornu is careful to base his argument on the Saussurian ‘science of language’ while at the same time (and no doubt unconsciously) holding lay or profane prediscourses that will seem particularly ‘naïve’ to professional linguists. For example, Cornu defines legal linguistics as ‘the particular application of the fundamental science of general linguistics to the language of law’, and notes that ‘he may at least entertain the hope that his work will be acknowledged as a kind of practical linguistics, in the same way as linguistics applied to poetry’ (2005 [1990]: 25; translated from the French). The analogy between law and poetry is supported by a reference to R. Jakobson. Cornu applies Jacobson’s linguistic methodology (designed for the study of poetry) directly to the legal field – hence the final analogy: ‘What is true of poetic discourse should also be true of legal discourse’ (2005 [1990]: 25; translated from the French). To which we might ironically respond: duly noted. But the analogy is interesting precisely because it illustrates one of the most common forms of lay or profane thinking<sup>8</sup>: Cornu’s approach provides an example of the use of a folk method for the development of a folk body of knowledge. Cornu also describes legal vocabulary as ‘the reflection of the legal system’ (p.58), thereby implying a theory of language conceived as a reflection against which scientific (academic) linguistics has developed. The book includes many other examples of spontaneous linguistics polished by the veneer of academic linguistics to serve the use of language in his field. The main point is that the type of folk linguistics illustrated by Cornu actually ‘works’, as D.Dennett might put it (see *infra* 2.1.2.), in the sense of efficiently organizing and structuring the specialized uses of language in the legal domain.

### 1.3.2. *Artaud’s ‘other languages’*

‘In February 1947’, writes A. Tomiche (2002: 141), Artaud described this “other language” that he has never ceased to seek as a “humming/chanted/[...] between Negro/Chinese/Indian/and villon French”. Artaud not only emphasized the vocal dimension of the language, caught between song and scansion, but also underlined the mixture and blending of languages – specifically a blend of languages associated with syntactic transgressions and intelligibility. The case of Artaud provides an example of linguistic activity performed by a nonlinguist, a writer with linguistic, epilinguistic and multilinguistic knowledge well beyond the competence of the average speaker (Artaud was familiar with several foreign languages). Artaud’s aim was to develop a new language essentially characterized by blending and transgression. Not content with merely creating and inventing language forms, Artaud also analyzed language forms using a metalinguistic discourse illustrated by Tomiche in an example that perfectly illustrates a folk discursive position adopted by a writer:

I could give many examples, but instead I will give just one –and a particularly interesting example at that, since Artaud does not merely introduce a term, i.e.

‘têtème’ (a word that combines several languages) in a sentence in French: *‘Dans le sommeil on dort, il n’y a pas de moi et personne que du spectre,/ arrachement du têtème de l’être, par d’autres êtres (à ce moment-là éveillés), de ce qui fait que l’on est un corps’*. Not without irony, Artaud then proceeds to carry out a metalinguistic analysis of the morphology of the term, explaining that the word ‘têtème’ combines the Greek term *éma* (blood) with *tête* and ‘thé’ which, redoubled, refers to that which rests and that which burns: *‘Et qu’est-ce que le têtème?/ Le sang du corps à ce moment-là allongé, et qui sommeille car il dort. Comment le têtème est-il le sang? Par le éma, devant qui le t se repose et désigne ce qui se repose comme le tévé des Marseillais. Car le té fait un bruit de cendre lorsque la langue le dépose dans les lèvres où il va fumer./ Et Éma en grec veut dire sang. Et têtème, deux fois la cendre sur la flamme du caillot de sang, de caillot invétéré de sang qu’est le corps du dormeur qui rêve et ferait mieux de s’éveiller’* (XIV, p.16)<sup>9</sup>. (Tomiche 2002: 144; translated from the French)

### 1.3.3. Logophiles, glossomaniacs and other language fanatics

Not unlike writers and their own folk activity, but outside the field of literature and its fictional possibilities, the lover of language is involved in activities aimed at the invention of imaginary languages. A logophile is typically a folk linguist, as depicted by Yaguello in a study of ‘language fanatics’:

The language inventor is an amateur, in both senses of the term; through a lover of languages, s/he often knows nothing about the science of language. But above all s/he demonstrates an aesthetic form of concern: the desire to produce a comprehensive view, a totality, an enclosed yet exhaustive whole endowed with perfect symmetry, its cogs bathing in oil, and in which there is no room for discordance or ambiguity, and where wastage, equivocation and misunderstanding are banished. (Yaguello 2006: 45; translated from the French)

The social and professional position of the language lover implies contact with the data of culture. Unlike outsider artists devoid of culture, language lovers operate within the universe of literacy:

A language lover is generally a cleric, a professor or a doctor, i.e. a man with an office or practice, a man with a small beard and round metal glasses, as shown by the gallery of portraits adorning the book by Monnerot-Dumaine, one of the two bibles of interlinguistics. (Yaguello 2006: 46; translated from the French)

Language lovers engage in professional activities that closely resemble the activities of scholarly (academic) linguistics, even if they lack the specialized knowledge of academic linguistics. According to Yaguello, the work of the logophile involves:

1. Accumulating data;

2. Classifying data;
3. Establishing an explanatory principle – e.g. the imitation of the sounds of nature, or a correspondence between the meaning of words and their acoustic and/or articulatory realization;
4. Organizing data in the form of a genealogical tree, with the mother language giving birth to its offspring, i.e. the past and present languages of humanity. (Yaguello 2006: 47)

#### 1.3.4. *Ludo-linguists or when folk linguistics enters the stage*

As noted above, ludo-linguists are defined as experts in the playful manipulation of signifiers. This section provides a more detailed case study of impersonators and impressionists, especially those specialized in accent imitation. An ability to imitate accents is a key skill in the repertoire of all comedians and humorists (professional impressionists or amateurs) and is founded on a spontaneous socio-linguistic theory. Accents are phonic manifestations of regional, national, social, ethnic-cultural, gender, sexual and other variations. Examples of social accent variation include the impressions performed by Valérie Lemerrier in the film *Les Visiteurs* (see her impression of the aristocratic accent exemplified by ‘Béa’ de Montmirail on seeing her ancestor ‘Hub’ arriving from the Middle Ages accompanied by her loyal servant Jacquouille la Fripouille, 1993), the ‘*grande bourgeoise*’ impressions performed by Sylvie Joly in her show *La cigale et la Joly* (2006), and the intonations of the actress Mathilde Casadesus, scientifically recorded in the audio document accompanying the book *Les accents de France* edited by Léon et al. (Léon et al., 1983). Impressions of ethnic cultural accents<sup>10</sup> can be found in performances by ‘Omar et Fred’ in the short television show ‘*Le service après-vente des émissions*’ currently broadcast in the early evening on the French television channel Canal + (see in particular Omar’s impression of a generic ‘African’ accent), in television appearances by the tennis player and singer Yannick Noah (see in particular Noah’s anti-racist impression of a Cameroonian accent), in the exaggerated North African tones and inflections of Djamel Debbouze and Mohand Saïd Fellag (Terbouche 2008)<sup>11</sup>, and in the Jewish-North African emphases of comedians Elie Kakou and Gad Elmaleh. Returning to fashion thanks to the short television show *Les Deschiens* in the late 1990s (with impressions focusing in particular on the rural accent of the Sarthe region of France; see Pugnière, 2006), and more recently the French film *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis* by Dany Boon (2007), regional accents have long been a target of (more or less disparaging) impressions, particularly among writers, as illustrated by the famous scene in Molière’s *Don Juan* involving the peasants Charlotte and Pierrot (act 2, scene 1). Accents that are more difficult to capture and label (the term *sexual* is unsatisfactory while homosexual is *inaccurate*; I prefer the terms *gendered accent* or *sexual identity accent*, even *sexual preference accent*) and that are more stigmatizing, such as the ‘gay’ accent illustrated by the ‘*folle*’ articulations of Michel Serrault in the play and film *La Cage aux Folles* and Gad Elmaleh in the film *Chouchou* by Merzak Allouache (2003), also provide evidence of the linguistic skills of impressionists and impersonators – skills based on a subtle though non-scientific (i.e. non-academic) treatment of phonetic phenomena. It is important to recognize that professional linguists rarely examine accents, particularly accents that have an ethnic,



cultural, ‘sexuality’ or community dimension: to the best of the author’s knowledge, no research has so far been conducted in France on the ‘gay’ accent, in its *folle* version or otherwise, with the exception of a paper by Siouffi entitled ‘Les homos parlent-ils comme les hommes ou comme les femmes?’ (1998). Although the issue is addressed in American social dialectology, particularly in research on linguistic attitudes (see for example Preston 1992), very few studies have been conducted in the area. Accents have been explored at length by other folk linguists, for instance sociologist-linguists (who view accents as powerful social organizers), themselves positioned at the heart of the folk activities of a third category of folk linguists – the dominant classes. J.-C. Passeron argues that the dominant classes perform a linguistic activity of intervention, i.e. social ranking based on accents:

In the same way that the spontaneous linguistics of the dominant classes defines the dominant accent as an *absence* of accent, i.e. a ‘zero accent’ against which regional or popular accents are understood and defined as more or less colorful deformations, so the spontaneous stylistics of modes of livelihood establishes the marks borne by the dominant classes (and which indicate both domination and the constraints entailed by the exercise of domination) as non-marks serving as a counter-point for perceiving the deformations of popular bodies and faces. (Passeron 1999, online; translated from the French)

### *1.3.5. Activist speakers: a folk analysis of discourse*

I would like to conclude this presentation of examples with an example of folk linguistics in the specific context of activism – in this instance a folk analysis of discourse. The case in point is ‘a workshop for the analysis and critique of political discourse’ ironically entitled ‘The re-enchanted world of Nicolas Sarkozy’ and held in the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris in November 2007 by the ‘Coordination des Intermittents et Précaires d’Ile-de-France’. The first session was presented as follows:

First session: Wednesday 31 October 2007, 7pm to 10pm at the CIP-IDF

The basic idea is relatively simple: the point is to conduct a collective analysis and critique of political discourse as part of a workshop open to all. In our view, theoretical thought cannot be the primary focus of the project, since an understanding of certain key notions and tools would need to be taken for granted, thereby automatically limiting access to the workshop. Rather, the project is designed as a practical and political workshop, if viewed from the perspective of its ultimate objective: to develop efficient means of countering the effects of authorized political discourse (both on us and on others). We might say therefore that it is a workshop for self-training in the critique of ideology

More concretely, we made a decision to work on speeches given by Nicolas Sarkozy. Discussions about the topic were heated, and as it turns out no one is entirely satisfied with the choice. We all agree that power comes from further afield and that its action extends well beyond the purely ‘political’ field, and that seeking for power precisely where we are told that it exclusively belongs is to fall prey to ideological discourse.

Having said that, if power is everywhere, then it hardly matters where it is captured, since the important thing is to focus our analysis and critique on a discourse that is both current and addressed to everyone – everyone has the right and (we firmly believe) the capacity to respond to it. (Announcement received via email, October 2007)

The passage quoted above shows that folk theory is a practical theory, or a theory of practice. Note that the object of the workshop is the use of discourse and its effects on individuals, and not (for example) the description of rules and regularities. Lay or profane knowledge is generally practical knowledge, a form of knowledge that is ‘useful’ to speakers for the purposes of operating in society. The point now is to consider the validity of folk theory.

## **2. What are folk linguistic theories actually worth?**

Folk linguistics raises one of the most difficult epistemological questions, particularly in the human and social sciences: namely the validity of (pseudo) scientific theories. In France, very little research has so far been conducted on this issue because folk linguistics has tended to be viewed as the embodiment of a normative position or as a reflection of purism (Paveau, Rosier 2008). Cartesianism and the positive (not to say positivist) images of science in widespread circulation in France have also done little to encourage this line of research. By contrast, the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of science (especially in the United States) have provided illuminating analyses of the folk sciences in general and of folk linguistics in particular. Without claiming to apply them mechanically, these analyses will be used to examine the validity of spontaneous theories of language.

### **2.1. Epistemic evaluations of folk linguistics**

Are folk theories valid? There are three possible answers to this question.

#### *2.1.1. The eliminative position*

In the philosophy of mind, the so-called eliminative position, or eliminative materialism (Feyerabend, Rorty, Sellars, Paul and Patricia Churchland, Laurence), is based on the thesis that an understanding of mental states founded on common sense theories is incorrect and invalid since it has no scientific basis. Common sense understanding is clearly not founded on neurological data. For example, there is no neuronal basis to certain theories of intentionality or even to consciousness itself, i.e. notions that are among the most difficult to naturalize. According to the philosopher Paul Churchland (2002 [1981]), folk theories are entirely false and are on the verge of being replaced (‘eliminated’) by irrefutable evidence provided by the neurosciences. Churchland’s view is shared by the philosopher Stephen Laurence (2003), who argues that folk theories in any science are usually incorrect, adding that linguistics is particularly vulnerable in view of the fact that it is such a relatively young theory.

Applied to the findings of folk linguistics, the eliminative theory would posit that folk theory is false because it is based on perceptive, intuitive, evaluative and even imaginative data, but not on any scientifically verifiable data.

### 2.1.2. *An intermediate position: Dennett's 'soft realism'*

The philosopher Daniel Dennett (1990 [1987], 2002 [1991]) has defended an intermediate position known as 'soft realism'. Dennett's position is situated halfway between the extremes of Fodor's 'industrial strength realism' and the Churchlands' eliminative materialism. His position specifically concerns folk psychology, which Dennett describes in the following terms:

People are even less predictable than the weather, if we rely on the scientific techniques of meteorologists and even biologists. But there is another perspective, familiar to us since childhood and used effortlessly by us all every day, that seems wonderfully able to make sense of this complexity. It is often called *folk psychology*. It is the perspective that invokes the family of "mentalist" concepts, such as belief, desire, knowledge, fear, pain, expectation, intention, understanding, dreaming, imagination, self-consciousness, and so on. (Dennett 1998 [1987]: 7)

Soft realism can be summarized as follows: folk vocabulary and folk concepts are operational and even necessary for social life, and spontaneous perceptions are absolutely fundamental patterns in human life:

There *are* patterns in human affairs that impose themselves, not quite inexorably but with great vigor, absorbing physical perturbations and variations that might as well be considered random; these are the patterns that we characterize in terms of the beliefs, desires and intentions of rational agents. (Dennett 1998 [1987]: 27)

As Dennett observes, folk psychology actually *works* ('treating each other as intentional systems works', p.51), even if it does not work *permanently*. While folk psychology may be an imperfect, incomplete and therefore non-generalizable theory, in many ways it is also a valid theory. It is perhaps useful to quote Dennett at some length here, especially his relatively comprehensive definition, which contains many elements that will be useful for the analysis of linguistic theory:

We use folk psychology all the time, to explain and predict each other's behavior; we attribute beliefs and desires to each other with confidence – and quite unself-consciously – and spend a substantial portion of our waking lives formulating the world – not excluding ourselves – in these terms. Folk psychology is about as pervasive a part of our second nature as is our folk physics of middle-sized objects. How good is folk psychology? If we concentrate on its weaknesses we will notice that we often are unable to make sense of particular bits of human behaviour (our own included) in terms of belief and desire, even in retrospect; we often cannot predict

accurately or reliably what a person will do or when; we often can find no resources within the theory for settling disagreements about particular attributions of belief or desire. If we concentrate on its strengths we find first that there are large areas in which it is extraordinarily reliable in its predictive power. [...] Second, we find that it is a theory of great generative power and efficiency. [...] Third, we find that even small children pick up facility with the theory at a time when they have a very limited experience of human activity from which to induce a theory. Fourth, we find that we all use folk psychology knowing next to nothing about what actually happens inside people's skulls. (Dennett 1998 [1987]: 47-48)

Applied to folk linguistics, Dennett's analysis would imply that the data of folk linguistics are acceptable and can be incorporated into linguistic theory since they provide exact perceptive and organizing descriptions of language, but they cannot serve as a basis for a general theory of language.

### *2.1.3. The integrational position: folk data are linguistic data*

This position emphasizes the knowledge of non-linguists, which is viewed as legitimate and recognizable as such. Preston and Niedzielski are clear from the outset of their synthesis: 'If the folk talk about language, they must, of course, know (or least believe they know) about it' (1999: 10). Linguistic theory is considered in terms of its operability and practical truth rather than its logical truth. The same position was also held by the social psychologists Llewellyn and Harrison in a study conducted on perceptions of linguistic and discursive forms in corporate communications (2006). Their study showed that participants demonstrated definite linguistic competence in recognizing uses of the pronoun *we* and in identifying passive transformation and nominalization. The study also found that the linguistic competence of participants can do without metalanguage and even without learning identified phrases:

In this regard, it is worth making the point that formal sounding linguistic categories, such as those discussed above, describe mundane features of everyday language use. It is perfectly possible for individuals to deploy and identify instances of "passive transformation", for example, without having heard of the term. (Llewellyn & Harrison 2006: 580)

In this respect, Llewellyn and Harrison share the same position as Sylvain Auroux, who observed in a study of grammatization that linguistic knowledge is not necessarily distinct from the knowledge provided by epilinguistic awareness:

The continuum between epilinguistics and metalinguistics can be compared to the continuum between perception and physical representation in the natural sciences. Whereas the natural sciences distanced themselves from perception at an early stage (from Galilean physics onwards) before departing still further from it in due course, linguistic knowledge has only sporadically broken its links with epilinguistic awareness. (Auroux 1994: 24; translated from the French)

For example, ‘naïve realism’ (Achard-Bayle 2008: 34 et seq. and here), which involves attributing concrete entities of the world with more or less discrete boundaries that make them coincide with the nouns designating them, may amount to a non-conscious form of epilinguistic knowledge (‘I call a cat a cat, full stop’, as the second-hand dealer quoted in the epigraph might have put it), but also to a scientific and argued philosophical-semantic position. The notion of epilinguistics is probably one of the keys for understanding how and why (not unlike folk psychology) folk linguistics actually ‘works’. Epilinguistic awareness is a structure that provides linguistic data gained by perception. If linguistics does empirical justice to the experiential and cultural dimensions of language, in other words if the object of linguistics incorporates the uses of language by social and cognitive subjects, the perceptive data of folk linguistics may be viewed as linguistic data per se.

## **2.2. To what extent are the intuitions of speakers verifiable?**

If folk linguistics, like folk psychology, may be said to ‘work’, it is because there is a source of perceptions, judgments and evaluations that can provide accurate results. In linguistics, this source is the intuition of the so-called ‘native speaker’ (to use Chomsky’s terminology) or epilinguistic awareness (to use the phrase coined by the French linguist Antoine Culioli<sup>12</sup>). Yet to what extent can all speakers be said to have or share the same intuition? Is there not a crucial difference between the intuition of the non-linguist speaker and the intuition of the linguist-speaker? The philosopher Michael Devitt argues that the intuitions of linguists are better than the intuitions of folk linguists because unlike received ideas, intuitions are not innate but theory-laden. Devitt provides a fairly robust critique of Chomskyan intuition and offers an alternative theory: ‘This theory treats linguistic intuitions as opinions resulting from ordinary empirical investigation, theory-laden in the way all such opinions are’ (Devitt 2006: 483). Devitt concludes by positing the impossibility of using such intuition as a foundation for linguistics on the grounds that it is not scientifically theory-laden:

I see linguists as pulled two ways in their treatment of the intuitive judgments of speakers. On the one hand, the received view is that speakers represent the true linguistic theory of their language and derive their intuitive judgments from those representations. So, those intuitive judgments, deploying terms drawn from that theory, should be the primary data for the linguist’s theory. On the other hand, there is the attractive thought that all judgments deploying those terms are laden with an empirical linguistic theory. Where the judgments are those of the ordinary speaker, that theory will be folk linguistics. We do not generally take theory-laden folk judgments as primary data for a theory. So we should not do so in linguistics. (Devitt 2006: 485)

The skepticism toward the intuition of the native speaker and ‘the contemplation of their own idiolects’ by linguists had already been criticized by Labov in the late 1960s (1976 [1972]: 37). Labov argued that the intuitions of linguists are far from being better than the intuitions of ‘folks’:

[...] what would happen if we submitted a sizeable sample of linguists' judgments on grammaticality to a general population ? The most systematic study of this type was carried out by Spencer (1973). She tested 150 sentences from syntactic studies by Perlmutter, Carlota Smith, Postal, Ross, Rosenbaum and R. Lakoff. There were 60 judges : 20 graduate students in linguistics, 20 other graduates students, and 20 people from the town of State College. [...]

If we examine all of these measures, we see that no one linguist did remarkably better or worse than others in this respect [...] There are no findings as yet that support the hope that the introspective judgments of linguists are reliable, reproducible, or general in their application to the speech community. We must then ask, what is the consequence of these facts for the linguistic theories which rest on such judgments? (Labov 1975: 15-16)

The intuitions of linguists are not credible not because they are cultured and pre-theorized (as Devitt would argue), but for epistemological reasons. According to Labov, linguistics should not be based on unverified intuitions and facts:

Since every study of intuitive judgments carried out so far indicates that there is a sizeable experimenter effect, the uncontrolled intuitions of linguists must be looked on with grave suspicion. If these intuitions are said to represent only the linguist's idiolect, then the value of his analyses rests on a very uncertain foundation. He might submit to further experimental studies so that others can test the consistency of his judgments [...]. (Labov 1975: 30)

Should we therefore eliminate data that are based on intuition? While it is clear that such data should not be discarded, linguistics needs to acknowledge and incorporate the relativity of intuition, or what Labov terms 'the experimenter effect', and to apply a number of key principles:

The solution to the problem stated so far seems clear enough. We need only (1) recognize the experimenter effect and (2) return to the original notion of working only with clear cases. We could then rest our work on three working principles which offer a fairly sound basis for continued exploration of grammatical judgments:

I. THE CONSENSUS PRINCIPLE: *if there is no reason to think otherwise, assume that the judgments of any native speaker are characteristic of all speakers of a language.*

II. THE EXPERIMENTER PRINCIPLE: *if there is any disagreement on introspective judgments, the judgments of those who are familiar with the theoretical issues may not be counted as evidence.*

III. THE CLEAR CASE PRINCIPLE: *disputed judgments should be shown to include at least one consistent pattern in the speech community or be abandoned [...].*

A fourth principle is called for – a *Principle of Validity*:

IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF VALIDITY: *when the use of language is shown to be more consistent than introspective judgments, a valid description of the language will agree with that use rather than introspections.* (Labov 1975: 30-31 and 40)

The four principles (consensus, experimenter, clear cases and validity) have a number of implications for linguistic practices (including reducing the relativity and non-credibility of data based on intuition, irrespective of the type of speaker), but also for the epistemology of linguistics. In particular, they reinforce the idea of a continuum between the competence of linguists and the competence of non-linguists since they rationalize intuitive data.

### **2.3. When nonlinguists produce the research objects of linguists: the case of linguistic attitudes**

Folk linguistic opinions and knowledge constitute social theories of language. Applying generally to language practices through descriptions, prescriptions and interventions, folk theories provide social organizers that form a body of social knowledge. Socio-linguistics (operating as *social* linguistics) takes these social organizers as its objects of study, or more precisely as its meta-objects (i.e. objects talking about objects), referring to them as *attitudes* or *representations*.

Language practices are used by lay speakers as a tool for psychological and social description. In their introduction to an issue of the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* devoted to linguistic attitudes, Preston and Milroy observed that speakers tend to match psychological traits with linguistic traits:

Notably, several studies showed a tendency for judges to discriminate between, on the one hand, status dimensions such as intelligence, ambition, and confidence, and, on the other, solidarity-related dimensions such as social attractiveness, friendliness, and generosity. Standard speakers have tended to be rated higher on the former set of traits and downgraded on the latter, the converse being true of judgments of non standard speakers (e.g. Ryan, Giles, & Sebastian, 1982, p.9). – (Preston, Milroy, 1999: 4-5)

Van Bezooijen and Gooskens made a similar observation in a study examining the perception of variety among Dutch speakers:

Intraculturally (by Dutch listeners), as well as cross-culturally (by British, Kenyan, Mexican, and Japanese listeners), a “lively” manner of speaking is strongly associated with dominance, will, power, and self-confidence. As expected, pronunciation, allowing dialect identification, only played a role intraculturally. (Van Bezooijen, Gooskens 1999: 31-32)

The results of the ‘Lambert method’ (Lambert et al., 1960) are well-known: unbeknownst to subjects, bilingual speakers recorded versions of the same text in two or several languages or varieties in such a way as to eliminate voice bias. The subjects were then asked to evaluate the speaker using a scale involving antonymous adjectives (the speaker is friendly vs.

unfriendly, reliable vs. suspicious, gentle vs. violent, etc.). The method tends to produce fairly reliable results. For example, one study showed that native male English speakers tend to perceive women more positively if they speak French and that the latter generally return the favor: women's view of native male English speakers was found to be more positive than their view of native male speakers of other languages.

Non-scientific perceptions, laden with imaginary representations and productions, may therefore be said to constitute spontaneous theories of socio-psychological classification.

### **Conclusion: nonlinguists are valuable linguists**

This paper has argued that data drawn from folk disciplinary practices can be fully incorporated into linguistic analysis. Folk linguistics has its own validity (a practical and representational validity) and should therefore be viewed by academic linguists as a reservoir of data that no professional linguist could possibly collect using 'scientific' (academic) methods.

The extreme diversity of folk discursive positions, of the corresponding practices, and of the data thus collected, as well as the scientific uncertainty of many scientific observations (based on subjective positions since they are frequently idiolectal), should perhaps encourage us to reconsider and rethink the object of linguistics. If we accept, along with Bourdieu and Aurox, that 'the historicization of the subject of historicization' (Bourdieu 2001; translated from the French) is an epistemological necessity, then it seems hardly reasonable to persist in defining the object of linguistics as Saussure did in 1916. The object of linguistics has been profoundly affected by the knowledge of which it has been the target, and folk knowledge is an integral part of such knowledge. This paper argues that we need to provide a convincing and (above all) a scientifically efficient new description of the object of linguistics and to adopt an anti-eliminative position that incorporates the various *degrees* of linguistic knowledge (from the 'hardest' scientific knowledge to the 'softest' folk knowledge).

An integrational perspective means opting for *and* rather than *or* – i.e. the linguist *and* the second-hand dealer, the writer *and* the one man show, the glossomaniac *and* the political activist.



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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first published in french in Achard-Bayle, G., Paveau, M.-A. (eds) (2008a): « Linguistique populaire ? », *Pratiques* 139-140: 93-110.

<sup>2</sup> See Achard-Bayle, Paveau (2008b), Achard-Bayle, Lecolle 2009, Antos 1996, Beacco (ed.) 2004, Brekle 1989, Niedzielski, Preston 2003 [1999], Paveau 2000, 2005, 2007, 2008a, 2009, Paveau, Rosier, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> I suggested the term in Paveau 2007 to describe a position that 1) considers folk linguistics from a non-binary perspective and as a matter of degree, i.e. in contrast to academic (scholarly) linguistics; and 2) aims to fully incorporate folk data into the scientific study of language.

<sup>4</sup> See Paveau, Rosier 2008.

<sup>5</sup> The five daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Holl, Jenny, Lydia, Beth, Nicole and Esther, are better illustrations of the extreme linguistic virtuosity, at the limit of theoretical mastery, of punsters and wordsmiths (in french : ‘*j’ai ni diabète ni cholestérol*’).

<sup>6</sup> The term *logophile* is drawn from Pierssens (1976), while the term *glossomaniac* was coined by Eco (1994).

<sup>7</sup> See <http://correcteurs.blog.lemonde.fr>

<sup>8</sup> Douay-Soublin’s unsurpassed paper is still the best synthesis of the issue: ‘La contre-analogie. Réflexion sur la récusation de certaines analogies pourtant bien formées cognitivement’ (Douay-Soublin 1987).

<sup>9</sup> The edition used is Artaud’s *Œuvres Complètes*, Gallimard, 1976-1994.

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<sup>10</sup> The term *ethnic-cultural* is used to refer to an accent found in a community of speakers with an immigration background, particularly immigrants from formerly colonized countries who were born in France but inherited the accent of the language of origin (particularly North Africa and Black Africa). Here, ethnic-cultural accents also include the accents of speakers from the DOM-TOM, Antilles-French Guiana, the Indian Ocean, and New Caledonia.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Comment vous dire/le costume/Il était tellement petit/que/c’est une coustume [kustim]’ (from the show *Cocktail Khorotv* (literally, *Cocktail of lies*), quoted by Terbouche 2008: 14).

<sup>12</sup> *Speaker intuition* and *epilinguistic awareness*, the former of American origin and the latter of French origin, tend in many respects to overlap. Both concepts refer to a non-objectified, non-formulated (non-articulated) and non-formalized competence of speakers in relation to their language productions. In the introspective method, the faculty shifts toward metalanguage, whether spontaneous or erudite.